



U.S. Representative

Bernie Sanders

A Special Focus on National Priorities



Summer 2000

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Fellow Vermonter,

This nation has the capability to provide a decent standard of living for every man, woman and child. Unfortunately, because of the power and greed of well-funded special interest groups and the distorted priorities of Congress, this achievable vision remains a long way from becoming a reality.

The Congress this year will be appropriating a total of \$1.8 trillion in 13 appropriation bills. Sadly, there have been significant increases in areas that deserve major cuts in funding, while not enough money is going into areas that are severely under-funded. Despite the end of the Cold War, Congress increased military spending by \$22 billion – including billions for the unneeded and unworkable Star Wars Missile Defense system. At the same time, spending on critical social needs such as education, childcare, housing and environmental protection is being cut or frozen.

We are often told by Congressional leaders that we just can't afford to adequately fund the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. Amazingly, however, these same Congressional leaders always manage to find tens of billions of dollars for huge tax breaks for the wealthiest individuals in the country. The repeal of the estate tax, for example, which recently passed in the House, would provide half the benefits to the richest one-tenth of 1% of the population.

Meanwhile, the fuel that's driving this regressive agenda – huge campaign donations from corporate interests and the wealthy – continues to flood Washington. And even modest campaign finance reform legislation is tied up in Congress.

Still, despite the obstacles, I am proud of the progress my office is making. In the last several years we have helped protect the pensions of tens of thousands of workers in Vermont and across the country, and we have made some real progress in the fight against the outrageously high cost of prescription drugs. We have passed legislation to provide food supplements for ten thousand low-income Vermont senior citizens and secured funding to help family farmers in our state develop alternative sources of income through agri-tourism.

Recently, the House passed an amendment I offered to significantly increase funding to help families weatherize their homes. We have brought funds into the state to enable Vermont high school students to play an important role in combating child labor. And we are currently making some real progress in the fight for a Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve to reduce the price of home heating oil, as well as in efforts to promote small business development and protect our environment.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about legislation or other matters, please do not hesitate to contact my office by phone, letter or email. My Burlington office is at **1 Church Street, 2nd Floor, Burlington, VT 05401, (800) 339-9834**, and my Washington office is at **2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-4115**. I have also recently opened an office in Brattleboro, at **167 Main Street, Room 410, Brattleboro, VT 05301, (802) 254-8632**. My email address is **bernie@mail.house.gov**. In addition, please check out our website at **bernie.house.gov**. You'll find a wealth of information there. I hope this newsletter is helpful and informative to you.

Sincerely yours,

Bernie
Bernard Sanders
Member of Congress

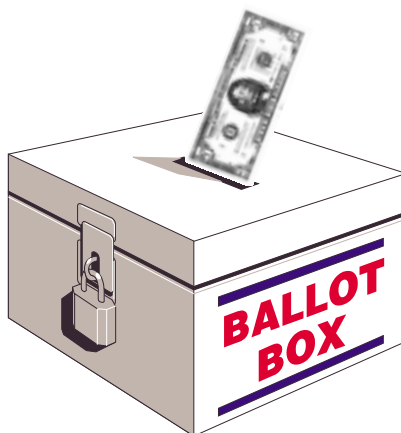
Reforming Our Campaign Finance System

To understand why the gap between the rich and the poor is growing wider while Congress passes tax breaks for the wealthy – and why Congress is increasing spending on weapons while it cuts funding for urgent social needs – you need to know how federal political campaigns are financed. Campaign spending is out of control, and campaign fundraising is dominated by large corporations and wealthy individuals.

According to the Federal Election Commission, a record-breaking \$3 billion will be spent in this year's congressional and presidential campaigns. Where is this money coming from? The Center for Public Integrity says that less than 5% of Americans contribute to political campaigns, and less than one-quarter of 1% of all Americans contribute \$200 or more. The bulk of political money comes from businesses and organizations that want special treatment from Washington. Is it just a coincidence that Americans pay the highest prices for prescription drugs in the industrialized world, while the phar-

maceutical industry spends \$73.8 million on lobbying in a single year?

As the amount of money spent on campaigns goes up, voter turnout goes down. In our most recent nationwide elections, only 36% of eligible voters cast their ballots. The United States now has the lowest voter turnout of any industrialized nation in the world. Among young people under the age of 24, voter turnout is barely 20%. What does that say for the future of our democracy? Tragically, even modest campaign finance reform legislation (known



as the McCain-Feingold bill) to ban soft money in federal elections and regulate "issue advocacy" spending has been tied up by a filibuster in the Senate. A Congress that benefits so heavily from hundreds of millions of dollars of campaign money is, to say the least, reluctant to change the system.

I support the House version of the McCain-Feingold bill (the Shays-Meehan bill) because it is the best bill that has any chance of passing in this Congress. But ultimately we will need more significant reform, such as the "Clean Money, Clean Elections" bill which I am cosponsoring. This bill is similar to Vermont's new campaign finance law. It would impose real spending limits in return for a fixed and equal campaign allowance from a publicly-financed Clean Money Fund. Vermonters should be proud that our state legislature passed significant campaign finance reform. It can be a model for the U.S. Congress. My goal is to see the Vermont law become our nation's law.

Food Supplements for Low-income Vermonters

No one in America should go hungry, least of all senior citizens or children. Unfortunately, millions of low-income Americans are having a hard time buying the food they need, and many senior citizens enter the hospital suffering from malnutrition. Last year Congress passed an amendment that I offered which increased funding for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program by \$10 million. This increased funding enabled the program to expand, for the first time in 12 years, from 18 states to 23 states – including Vermont. The program is being administered by the Vermont Department of Health, and by the end of the year it should provide nutritious food to about 10,000 Vermonters.

The commodities being distributed each month are valued at about \$60 and include cheese, canned vegetables and fruits, cereal, tuna fish, peanut butter, macaroni and

canned meat. For more information about this important program please call the Vermont Department of Health at (800) 464-4343.

Child Labor

Most of us would never support a business that exploits children. But chances are we may have done just that on our last shopping trip. Even common purchases – a leather bag, a shirt, a pair of jeans or produce from the local grocery store – can be the products of child labor. I have been working hard to end the scourge of child labor. Most recently, I was able to include \$300,000 in the Omnibus Appropriations bill to develop a model educational curriculum on child labor issues.

This funding will go to the School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro and Brattleboro Union High School. Vermont has a unique opportunity to pioneer a model curriculum that exposes child labor to young people so they will be able to combat it.



Genetically Modified Food

The next time you buy something from the supermarket, look at the product's ingredient label. You will find a wealth of information about fat content, carbohydrates and the litany of ingredients used to make the product. However, you won't find anything on the label that mentions whether the product contains genetically modified organism (GMO) material. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has ruled that GMO foods do not need to be labeled, despite recent scientific research that raises significant health and environmental concerns about these products.

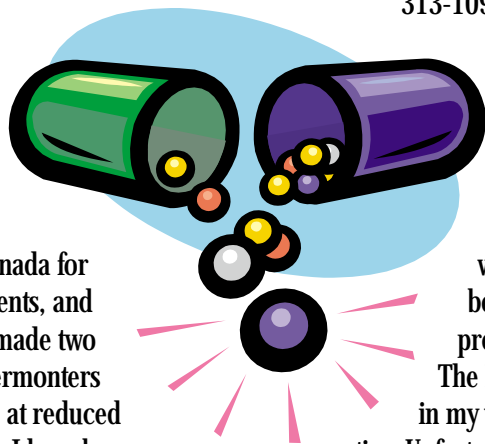
Following these recent scientific studies, most European countries require GMO labeling. More than 50% of American soybeans are genetically modified, 30% of American corn is produced from genetically modified seeds, and overall, more than 25% of all American cropland grows genetically engineered crops. In my view, Americans have the right to know whether the food they and their children are eating contains GMO materials. I am an original cosponsor of the "Genetically Modified Food Right to Know Act," which requires proper labeling of GMO foods. I also introduced the "Genetically Modified Food Safety Act," which would strengthen the FDA's ability to make sure our food supply is safe.

Lowering the Price of Prescription Drugs

The pharmaceutical industry is the most profitable in this country, with earnings last year of over \$27 billion. Yet it charges American consumers the highest prices in the world, and millions of our citizens simply cannot afford the medicine their doctors prescribe. A recent study showed that, on average, if senior citizens in the United States paid one dollar for a prescription drug, that same drug sold in Germany for 71 cents, Sweden for 68 cents, the United Kingdom for 65 cents, Canada for 64 cents, France for 57 cents, and Italy for 51 cents. I have made two trips to Canada to help Vermonters purchase their medicines at reduced prices, and in the process I have been able to document the horrendous price discrimination Americans face.

As one of the leaders in Congress on prescription drug reform, I am working on three separate approaches to this crisis. First, it is unacceptable that the taxpayers of

this country provide billions of dollars for drug research which is turned over to the drug companies – without any guarantee that the medicines developed from that research will be sold at reasonable prices. I am proud to report that an amendment I offered on the floor of the House to rectify that situation passed by a very strong vote of 313-109.



Second, both Democrats and Republicans have proposed Medicare prescription drug plans that would give seniors a benefit to help buy prescription drugs. The Republican plan is, in my view, totally ineffective. Unfortunately, while the

Democratic plan provides serious help for catastrophic needs, it does not go far enough to help most seniors. Along with other Progressives, I have developed the strongest Medicare prescription drug benefit proposal in Congress – a plan that

would provide real savings to millions of senior citizens.

Third, I believe that the price of drugs for all Americans must be substantially reduced. Legislation that I have offered, the “International Drug Parity Act,” now has 92 co-sponsors. A version of this bill recently passed in the Senate. It would lower the cost of prescription drugs in this country by 35-50%, and allow prescription drug distributors and pharmacists to purchase FDA safety-approved products anywhere in the world where they could get a good price.

Energy Savings Versus Corporate Welfare

Every year the U.S. Government doles out more than \$125 billion in “corporate welfare” – tax breaks, subsidies and other wasteful spending – to huge, profitable corporations. To add insult to injury, many of these corporate welfare programs contribute to the degradation of our environment. For the last three years I have successfully offered amendments that substantially cut funding for a huge giveaway to oil, gas and coal companies known as the Fossil Energy Research and Development Program. This year, as a result of an amendment I offered on the floor of the House, I was able to transfer \$45 million away from this corporate welfare program and put the funding into highly successful low-income weatherization and energy efficiency programs. As a result, an additional 10,000 low-income homeowners will receive weatherization assistance this year. Their homes will be warmer and better insulated, and we will prevent the waste of enormous amounts of energy.

A Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve

Last winter, Vermonters were forced to pay the highest prices in our history for home heating oil, and the oil crisis has now hit the entire country in the form of skyrocketing gas prices. To prepare for what may be a major crisis next winter in terms of escalating home heating oil prices, I introduced legislation to establish a Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve. This bill has widespread support and was overwhelmingly passed in the House. It also has the very strong backing of the President. My hope is that this legislation can be passed as soon as possible and be up and running before next winter. If we don’t adequately prepare for next winter now, it is likely that we will have a

home heating oil disaster on our hands again, and many people living on fixed incomes will be hurt. I have also joined with other members of Congress to ask the Federal Trade Commission to aggressively investigate apparent price gouging by the oil industry. During the first quarter of this year, oil industry profits soared by nearly 500 percent at the same time that the prices of home heating oil, diesel fuel and gasoline skyrocketed.



Women’s Business Centers

Women’s Business Centers are a tremendous resource for women entrepreneurs and women interested in starting their own businesses, providing them with financial and technical support. As large companies continue to downsize, small businesses with less than 19 employees generate 77% of net new jobs. It is more important than ever that Congress continue its commitment to funding small business startup programs that give back to


their communities. Several years ago I successfully offered an amendment that increased funding for the Women’s Business Centers Program, enabling the startup of the Vermont Women’s Business Center at Trinity College. Recently, I joined with Congressman Jim McGovern of Massachusetts to double the funding for this program. My hope is that the Senate will support our initiative and increase economic opportunities for small businesswomen.



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If you receive more than one copy of this newsletter, we apologize. Please feel free to pass the extra copy along to an interested friend.

This mailing was prepared, published, and mailed at taxpayer expense.

Progressive Report Card
for Congressman Bernie Sanders (1999-2000)

Grade	Group	Grade	Group
100%	AFL-CIO (Perfect score for supporting fair trade, Social Security and Medicare, public education, fair taxes, worker health and health care reform)	100%	League of Conservation Voters (Perfect score for protecting the environment)
100%	American Association of University Women (Perfect score for working to promote gender equity in public schools and the workplace, and end domestic violence)	100%	NARAL (Perfect score for supporting reproductive choice)
100%	Americans for Democratic Action (Perfect score for supporting the minimum wage increase, campaign finance reform, Social Security, civil rights, realigning budget priorities and ensuring quality health care)	Top 10%	National Taxpayers' Union (For voting to cut wasteful spending)
		100%	Public Citizen (Rep. Sanders is among the top10 Members of the U.S. House for supporting universal health care, campaign finance reform, and the environment)
		100%	U.S. PIRG (Perfect score for voting for the public interest and not corporate profit, strengthening campaign finance law and consumer protections)

Agri-tourism: Saving Family Farms

At a time of very low milk prices, many Vermont family farmers are fighting hard to keep their heads above water. One area that, in my view, has significant potential to help farmers find new sources of revenue is agri-tourism. Tourism brings more than \$2 billion into our state every year. Many tourists come to Vermont because of the incredibly beautiful rural landscape that our farmers maintain. Agri-tourism is a mechanism for farmers to receive a better share of the tourist dollar than they currently receive. The federal government’s agri-tourism initiative got its start last year as a result of an amendment I offered to provide \$1 million for a nation-wide, competitive

grant program. So far, Vermont has received \$750,000 from this program and used it to create a revolving loan fund for family farmers interested in starting farm-based tourism ventures. There appears to be a lot of interest in the program. My office alone has already distributed over 30 application

forms. Recently, at my request, the House of Representatives doubled funding for this program.

